

Harvard Allston Task Force
Meeting Minutes
Monday, March 13, 2006
Honan-Allston Library
7:00 p.m.

I. Attendance:

Harvard Allston Task Force

Paul Berkeley
John Bruno
Cathy Campbell
Rita DiGesse
Michael Hanlon
Bruce Houghton
Harry Mattison
Ray Mellone
Tim Norton

Boston Redevelopment Authority

Gerald Autler
Linda Kowalcky

Harvard University

John Audi
Harris Band
Jim Barrows
Gary Hammer
Kevin McCluskey
Dan Rabinovitz
Alison Reinhardt

II. Minutes

Gerald Autler called the meeting to order at approximately 7:05 p.m. and circulated the meeting minutes from the March 1st meeting. Ray confirmed that he wanted to continue to do a formal approval of the meeting minutes. Gerald introduced Harris Band, Director of Physical Planning for the Allston Development Group at Harvard, to present an overview of the North Allston Strategic Neighborhood Plan (NANSP). Harris was involved in the development of the NANSP from the start of the document until the finish in 2004.

Harris explained that the NANSP represented a shared vision, and collaborative effort between the City of Boston, the neighborhood, and Harvard. The firm Goody Clancy was hired to develop the NANSP and the document includes six major areas : shared values, basic agreements, vision statement, goals, guiding principles and implementation. Harris went on to

summarize the main points in each of these areas. The NANSP can be found in its entirety on the BRA's website. Upon completion of Harris's presentation he opened it up to questions and comments.

John Bruno stated that traffic is a very important component of the plan and there is a unique opportunity to improve the streets of Western Ave. and North Harvard St. to accommodate dedicated bus lanes/cut-outs at stops, and enable traffic to flow more freely. Mike Hanlon agreed and thought that the development of the first science building on Western Ave. brings with it an opportunity to have a bus stop there. Harris explained that there are many ways to cut into the current street grid and successfully improve transit movement. Ray Mellone said that a majority of the traffic in the neighborhood stems from regional traffic and suggested that regional traffic solutions must be addressed to help alleviate the traffic within the neighborhood.

Rita DiGesse said that parking is a major problem in the neighborhood and Harris suggested that part of the solution is to address the city's parking enforcement and regulations. Paul Berkeley agreed that if parking was restricted for certain time periods (morning and evening rush hours) on the streets it could help address the flow of traffic. Ray suggested that to help achieve traffic/roadway improvements and stricter regulations, Harvard should raise these issues with the appropriate transportation authorities because Harvard has the influence and resources to make things happen.

Harris announced that Harvard has made the decision to plant 25 mature trees on the site of One Western Avenue. This effort by Harvard is in part a response to the concerns of the neighborhood and an effort to soften the landscape. In the last year Harvard has planted 75-100 trees. Harris also announced that around 50 community members attend the Public Realm workshop on Barry's corner conducted by Harvard's consultant Project for Public Spaces (PPS). PPS divided the attendees into several sub-groups and went to areas in and around Barry's corner to brainstorm different uses and improvements for the area. A summary of the ideas generated will be shared for review in the near future.

Ray asked for an update on the negotiations between Charlesview and Harvard. Kevin McCluskey replied that Harvard has offered a swap of five acres of land at the University-owned Brighton Mills Shopping Center in exchange for the site of the Charlesview Apartments. The Charlesview Board sent the proposal to the Charlesview Development Committee and Kevin assumes that they are working on a response back to Harvard. Kevin said that the Shaw's building will remain under lease and that the University recognizes that Shaw's is a valuable service provider for the community. Ray referred to the meeting minutes from the March 1st meeting and asked whether there were any new answers to a lot of the procedural questions that were raised, such as whether the Task Force will have a role in the review and approvals process for the new Charlesview building if the deal is accepted. Gerald Autler responded that this issue is going to come up in a number of ways and it is going to be a balancing act to determine what role the Task Force will play. The Task Force is charged with reviewing Harvard's Institutional Master Plan and it is important for the Task Force to stay focused.

An audience member asked what Harvard plans to do with the land that is currently the Charlesview site if the deal is accepted. Kevin replied that the University is proposing options

that use the land for professional schools and/or a permanent presence for arts and culture. The audience member said that Brighton Mills is currently a nice shopping center and the plan to move out the only retail store and replace it with residential properties does not seem like a good option to him. Paul asked whether there would be a physical separation between the new Charlesview complex and Shaw's. Kevin replied that the design issues would be something that would be a product of the Charlesview Board and Development committee, but in his opinion he would imagine that there would be some sort of buffer between the two.

John Bruno said that Charlesview may want to increase the number of units for the complex and that this would dictate the massing and density. John felt the Task Force should be involved in such a change in consideration of the current neighbors of Brighton Mills.

An audience member asked why Harvard would seek to use an occupied commercial space when there are currently a lot of empty spaces in the Brighton Mills shopping center. He asked why Harvard couldn't rent out some of the buildings to boost the economic activity in the area. Kevin said that Harvard recognizes the value of a vibrant commercial district and he doesn't equate having new housing in that area with the loss of Brighton Mills as a commercial district. Rita asked about the possibility of moving K-Mart to one of the adjoining empty spaces in the shopping center. Kevin said that such a move is not likely to happen because K-Mart requires a lot of floor area for its stores—more than the existing vacant spaces could provide.

Paul noted that in the proposal for the trees at One Western Ave., the trees were only along Soldiers Field Road and that this undermined the intent to have the building open up to Allston and promote connectivity between the University and the neighborhood. Harris said that the trees were intended in part to buffer the One Western Avenue residents from Soldiers Field Road and to enhance the open space. It was noted that the setback along Western Avenue is limited and that there is likely not enough space to accommodate such large trees along the Western Avenue side of the building.

Kevin stated that plans to improve the acoustics in the conference room of the Honan-Allston Library are moving forward once again.

An audience member asked why the Charlesview housing complex had to be rebuilt and why Harvard couldn't just distribute the money to the residents to be used toward purchasing their own homes. Linda Kowalcky stated that the Charlesview housing complex is a federally-subsidized development, and that there are specific requirements that govern the relocation and replacement of such units.

Harry Mattison and other Task Force members expressed a desire to have a clearer agenda and timeline from Harvard and the BRA to provide a better picture of what to anticipate over the next few months of Task Force meetings. Gerald agreed to work with Harvard to provide this for the Task Force.

Ray made a motion to change the meeting time to start at 6:30 p.m. rather than 7:00 p.m. The majority of the Task Force members agreed and Gerald said he would notify everyone that all Task Force meetings would now start at 6:30 p.m.

Mike Hanlon made a motion to approve the meeting minutes from March 1, 2006 and Cathy Campbell seconded the motion.

Harry asked if the Task Force could have a role in defining the agenda. Gerald said that if there is something that the Task Force wants to address they should bring it to his attention so he can determine if it falls within the Task Force's role.

Bruce Houghton asked whether community benefits could be an agenda item to be discussed. Gerald said that once Harvard has defined a more specific development proposal, the Task Force can review it and begin the discussion about appropriate community benefits. Kevin mentioned that the best ideas emerge from community discussions and that the community can always come to Harvard with ideas about the kinds of things it is interested in exploring. Kevin said Harvard has initiated community benefits as of a matter of course rather than waiting for a specific development project in an effort to get a permit. An audience member asked whether a committee would be established to review the community benefit proposals and Gerald said that the Task Force was established to represent the community, so it would be the job of the Task Force. Rita said that much of what Harvard has provided for the community has been because the community initiated the discussion, and she suggested that the community doesn't have to wait for a specific time to ask if they have something in mind. She stated that Harvard has been very responsive to the community in providing benefits when the community has made specific requests. Kevin agreed and said it was a continuing relationship between Harvard and the community and Harvard tries to be as responsive as it can be. Kevin said the University doesn't want to be presumptive in assuming what the community wants. He encouraged the Task Force to think about the types of benefits that would be most meaningful to the community.

Paul suggested that Harvard could also be proactive in proposing community benefits rather than waiting for the community to ask.

The meeting closed at 8:45 p.m.